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## Thin Blue Seam

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§ *Thin Blue Seam* §

*Senior project submitted to:*

*Division of the Arts  
of Bard College*

*by*

*Sebastián Antón-Ojeda  
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This performance began as an exploration of liminal spaces in the context of a post-modern world. The lines between a suburban, consumptive society, fraught with binaries and thresholds while on the fringes of nature, were what interested me the most. However, this line of thought quickly took me to far more ancient places, to a view of nature driven by animism and pervaded by spiritual introspection. In Celtic Ireland, to give an example, every stone and river is witness to a myth. The Celts of the old world as described by anthropologist Marie-Louise Sjoestedt are constantly straddling the line between the natural and the supernatural. Meanwhile, off in northeast Georgia, mountaineers worshipped the pre-Christian deity “Adgilis Deda”, the “mother of locality” or so called “place-mother”, a protective spirit inseparable from her environment and from the Georgians’ relation to the natural spaces in which they dwell. This concept of a protective spirit was even used by the Romans, which they called “genius-loci”. The ultimate liminal space for me to explore then became the spectrum of nature and society, of humanity and spirituality. And so I became drawn to early polyphonic vocal music, from folk traditions as eclectic as Bulgaria and Georgia to Christian hymns sung all across Europe, and deep into the Russian Orthodox Church.

The piece *Agni Parthene*, which I sung with FFT processing in my performance, is a hymn sung in Old Church Slavonic, from a melody supposedly given to a Greek monk in a vision. The voice being the most essential instrument to both my music and my spiritual contentedness, I began to appreciate the value of breath and repetition for sinking into myself so as to interpret these old words. Though not a Christian myself, I’ve begun to perceive a continuity between Christian (as well as pagan) chants and modern electro-acoustic music: both are concerned with long gestures, introspection, and spacial awareness. Envelope, intonation according to the acoustics of a space, the timbral (or overtone) content of a harmony, these are all the common tools of both electro-acoustic and polyphonic vocal musicians. And so I found my medium: I wanted to create a piece that linked electronic processing, composition for strings, and vocal polyphony in a way that appeared seamless, without clear starts and stops, so as to invite the audience to question the nodes at which one form begins, and another ends. Like a waveform whose pitch is defined by the frequency at which it completes a cycle back to zero, the vocal polyphony would serve as a return point, or an exhalation, to imply a greater periodic structure.

However, one thing was missing: I wanted to incorporate the final element necessary to ground this project in human interactivity, that is I needed a rhythm section. Thomas Turino describes ethnomusicology with the term “the politics of participation”, and I must agree with him. Music as a

social act reaffirms its own potency, and invites it into the human space in a way that is not aloof or overly spiritual. And so I worked on developing my songs with my band, to really develop their groove and concision. Having such a vibrant ensemble to play this music with me was essential for the composition process itself. I believe that the excitement of playing in a group is what makes the musical medium so viscerally pervasive and valuable in society.

One final note, for the visual component to this piece I extensively explored Lissajous forms, which I believe are the essential visual companion to all of the thematic work I've developed. To put it briefly, Lissajous patterns are figures that are sensitive to the ratio  $a/b$  for two different waveforms (a, b) such that their relative phase is proportional to that ratio. What this expresses visually is a geometrically satisfying pattern that illustrates consonance, which in early Western music is the holiest sort of harmony. That consonance is sensitive to ratios described by the harmonic series, where each overtone is an integer multiple of the lowest base frequency. The ratio of an octave ( $2/1$ ) or a fifth ( $3/2$ ) comes up in (I'd venture to say) any and every musical practice that one can name. It took hundreds of years for Gregorian singers to accept intervals that weren't "perfect" (their earliest polyphony used only fourths, fifths, and octaves, to serve the function of becoming closer to God). And we know that Western African cultures valued the ratio of  $3/2$  to order both their music and their societies (and this is just to name a couple of examples).

Patterns, periodicity, intervallic structure, feedback, these are all descriptions essential to the phenomenon of music as well as to the complexity of natural ecosystems, human society, electrical mechanics, and even how we breathe. An inhalation, an exhalation. A zero and a one. A positive and a negative. Without these dualities, my project could not exist. And where the beauty lies is in the liminal space between those nodes. That is what I call the *Thin Blue Seam*, inspired by Carl Sagan after having a hypnagogic vision. That is where my project starts, ends, and will inevitably repeat as I move on.

This has been a *work in progress*.

¿~~;{#};~~?

# § *Thin Blue Seam* §

~~:..{Ø}:..~~

Open: Wound

## Part I - Genius Loci

I woke up to the happiest day of my life  
Place-Mother

*(Agni Parthene)*

## Part II - Cycle // Phase

Weather Row  
Untitled

*(Entropy)*

## Part III - Metempsychosis

Baker's Day  
This Has Been

Closing: Wound

ι~~;{ÿ};~~?

# Open Wound; Theme

$\text{♩} = 75$   
Iteration ++

Violin

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

*p* *mf* *f* *>mp* *f*

*p* *mf* *f* *>mp* *gliss.*

*mf* *f* *mp* *gliss.*

*f*

10

Vln.

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

**‘I woke up to the happiest day of my life (the spaces in between are overgrown)’**

1. { I woke up to the happiest day of my life  
and in the pale blue light, morning rain rubbing down } -- *silent invocation*

2. { I’m gonna ride into town and explain myself  
through the passionate groves in the shade  
My median space is overgrown  
leaving the town, I wish I stayed

but I can’t restrain myself x2

Far removed from the cracks, wide open space  
the hairpins pretend to be born  
Pass on through the gate, see where my head goes  
led me all the way to my house:

Where I woke up and noticed things were strange (echo)  
Adgilis Deda, where’ve you gone? Hope for rain, lines are drawn

I rolled my windows down and took a life (echo)  
and when I look outside it’s my oh my oh my x2 } --- *country krautrock*

3. { We woke up to the saddest day of our lives  
suspended by a sunbeam that dried all our clothes  
Please return us to the wilds I left behind

Riding in my brand new car, windows shut  
to watch the days go by } --- *spaces between notes (let strings in)*

(Brief pause)

4. *p(pet sounds)* ---intrepid melody---  
////  
---wide open gate---

5. { I took my kids down to the pool  
the leaves are turning red my house is getting cold x2

I opened my gmail, it’s all on the cloud

How am I supposed to drive home? How am I getting home? } --- *heroic trip*  
*hop?*

# I Woke Up to the Happiest Day of My Life

$\text{♩} = 80$   
When I look outside it's my oh my x2      Band together / sweep      Gaining confidence

Violin

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked as 80 (♩ = 80). The score is in 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "When I look outside it's my oh my x2", "Band together / sweep", and "Gaining confidence". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics (mp, mf). The first Violin staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second Violin staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Viola staff has an alto clef and a key signature of one flat. The Violoncello staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure contains the lyrics "When I look outside it's my oh my x2". The second measure contains the lyrics "Band together / sweep". The third measure contains the lyrics "Gaining confidence". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics (mp, mf). The first Violin staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second Violin staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Viola staff has an alto clef and a key signature of one flat. The Violoncello staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure contains the lyrics "When I look outside it's my oh my x2". The second measure contains the lyrics "Band together / sweep". The third measure contains the lyrics "Gaining confidence". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics (mp, mf).

12

Vln. *f* *gliss.* *mf*

Vln. *f* *gliss.* *mf*

Vla. *f* *mf*

Vlc. *f* *mf* *Suspended in the air*

19 Feeling intrepid Glide

Vln. I *f* *p* *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f*

Vlc. *f*



23

molto espressivo!

Vln. *p* *f*

Vln. *p* *f*

Vla. *p* *f*

Vlc. *p* *f*

27

Grapefruit Sul Pont. Helium Balloon

Vln. *ff*

Vln. *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vlc. *ff*

34

Vln.

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

39

Vln. Vln. Vla. Vlc.

44

Vln. Vln. Vla. Vlc.

**‘Place-Mother’**

1. Made a line from a tree to the soil  
deposit spirits on the forest floor  
The fox comes to bite your back, face down  
in the violence, I know the god you found

*How about if we don't?*

Speak voices in the mouths of mammals  
mother doesn't choose

*How about if we don't  
Break bread, broken bones*

2. While the space is filled with leaves  
Muted rain, the spirit finds release  
“I can't get away, my God  
no I can't get away from you”

*(aba re)*

4. Place-mother is watching over the wild ones  
I need some sleep to breach the divide between  
and fall (cradled) in the crests

5. Oh, the highs and lows are just a pole apart from unity  
Find her there, torn from the rest  
set on the path to close the wound in me

How about if we don't? (close the wound in me) x2  
How about if we made gods of ourselves

*I know the god you found*

~;/;/~  
*Strings beholden to nothing*  
~;/;/~

# Place-Mother

♩ = 75

Lotsa vibrato!

Violin

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

10

Vln.

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

17

Vln.

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

Hold

(Gliss down to out)

**‘Weather Row’**

A. { Weather Row, undertow split by trains  
Holy space free to vibrate, mind the nodes  
wet is the wound, and the rails are the seam }

B. { Weather Row, you’ve invoked my sorrow  
hear this calling, recited always

Running out of data, watch them sweep  
like the Neva, flow out the western side  
Gonna be genocide, miles and miles are wired

I’m all clear the world is freer x2 } --- *syncopation*

C. { A bird can fly alone, I breathe  
a bird can have a home in me:

It hasn’t flown home; the world is borne  
we built you from the ground  
descending down are the pale blue showers  
wipe away lines I traced

Happy smiles, fear the flood raining down

I scurry on back to my hole x2 } --- *fly like an arrow*

A. { Weather Row, undertow drained of rain  
wetlands pay in fibers pulled apart and splayed  
Where is the estuary, o Weather Row? }

;;  
*Break*  
;;

B. { Weather row, to invoke the ending  
the pendulum has stopped and the air’s suspended

Wide eyed gazing through the lens, I’m a telescope  
Hey, it’s alright baby }

*// Jam it out until the end //*

**‘Untitled’**

1. { Keepsakes last forever,  
a rocking chair and a sweater  
by a restless door that'll swing between again  
Prop a gate at the bend for Aisling }

*(band comes in, impatient on the one)*

2. { A draft with a voice mixed in through the latch  
what will keep one warm if the thread doesn't catch?  
On the floor by the altar, born of a liminal vein  
to be worn like a shawl, unwoven strain } --- sweater catches foire

/;:/  
*Strings, Italian prog fills*  
/;:/

4. { There is comfort in isolation  
while the climate inside grows impatient  
carrying whispers of wind, passing shivers through the trees  
it's the only perfect melody } --- *Key change, heavier on the down*

*//Wee jam in Cm-F// x4*

5. { We find ourselves in silence  
bathing in perfect stillness  
a beckoning sight, there is beauty in saying goodbye  
but I'll keep myself to myself this time } --- *Return to strings*

# Untitled

$\text{♩} = 73$

To be worn like a shawl, unspoken strain

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

10

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

18

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

Pizz.

26

Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

Arco

## ‘Baker’s Day’

1. { A child was a girl one day --- *strings sans band*  
passing flowers from hand to hand  
{now the worship would change,  
while the shrines stay the same}  
and the median is overgrown

She was left alone today  
in a hole having hidden away  
there was no one to pray to anyway  
we all wanted a Baker’s Day }

2. { Господи, воззвах к Тебе, услыши мя. / Услыши мя, Господи.

Господи, воззвах к Тебе, услыши мя: / вонми гласу моления моего, / внемди воззвати ми к Тебе.  
/ Услыши мя, Господи.

Да исправится молитва моя, / яко кадило пред Тобою, / воздеяние руку моею / – жертва  
вечерняя. / Услыши мя, Господи. } --- *modal Joy Division*

//  
Break  
//

4. { You left a window cracked --- *Back to the punk stuff*  
the wind came and blew me back  
when I opened my eyes the storm did subside  
but the weather hadn’t changed }

5. { There was a face that passed --- *Return to strings*  
a forgotten name etched in the glass  
when the windows in this home all break  
We will call it the Baker’s Day }



# Baker's Day

**♩ = 75**

Violin

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

*p* *mf*

*p* *mf*

*p* *mf*

*mf*

9

Violins I and II, Viola, and Violoncello parts, measures 9-12. The score shows dynamic markings of *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte) with hairpins indicating crescendos and decrescendos. The Viola part is in alto clef (C4 on the third line). The Violoncello part is in bass clef. The Violins I and II parts are in treble clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

17 Dig it  $\text{♩} = 75$  The median was overgrown

Vln. *gliss.* *ff* *mf* 9 *mp* *mf*

Vln. *gliss.* *ff* *f* 9 *mp* *mf*

Vla. *gliss.* *ff* *mf* *f* 9 *mp* *mf*

Vlc. *gliss.* *ff* *mf* 9 *mp* *mf*

35

Vln. *f* *mf* *mp*

Vln. *f* *mf* *gliss.* *mp*

Vla. *f* *mf* *mp*

Vlc. *f* *mf* *mp*

43 The weather hadn't changed

34

Vln. 34

Vln. 34

Vla. 34

Vlc. 34

82

Vln. *mf* *f*

Vln. *mf* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f*

Vlc. *f* *mf* *f*

87

Vln. *ff*

Vln. *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vlc. *ff* *p*

96

Vln.

Vln. *gliss.*

Vla. *gliss.*

Vlc. *gliss.*

## ‘This Has Been’

1. If the sails run wide, they are meant to leave Mars on  
We’ll be back, Adeline, I’m terrified of changes  
I don’t wanna know if it’s true,  
but if they lines I drew are new...

*Then the wound is the path to the seam  
to behold the circumstance through a thin blue screen  
in the sea pulling back for a share of the shore*

2. When the ending frays, I’ll settle down for the ships to play  
There’s a gaping hole in my certainty  
we’ll go back maybe, if just to fill the spaces  
I wanna go home, but it’s hard. The path was in the dark

*Hiding out at the gate where the bend folds in  
To pass would indeed be to flow, the seam is sown in  
It’s heavy out there, anything can propagate  
the space I left for the sound to find you*

~~://{æ}\\:~~

*Serpentine Adeline, borderline by design  
Murmur by open mind, passing into the light*

3. And so it’s all for me to gaze upon  
yeah it’s all for you too, if you choose  
Left with all this latent forming  
now it’s all brand new

This has been...

~/:+:/~  
*At the behest*  
~/:+:/~